UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE
Radio Service

Housekeepers' Chat Tuesday, July 8, 1930.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "Food Poisoning -- How to Prevent it." Information from Food, Drug, and Insecticide Administration, U. S. D. A.

Publication available: "Food Poisoning and the Law."

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What do we mean by food poisoning? How can we prevent it?

These two questions I will answer for you today -- with the help of the Food, Drug, and Insecticide Administration of the Department of Agriculture. Representatives of the Food, Drug and Insecticide Administration are always on the lookout for foods which may be dangerous to health. When they find dangerous foods on the market, they immediately remove them.

But these government officials can't come into our homes, sample our chicken patties, and tell us whether it's safe to eat them. It probably is, unless they have been kept in a warm place too long.

Do you remember reading about the chicken pattie poisoning, within the last year or so? Chicken patties upset 200 out of 600 people attending a luncheon. In another instance, meat sandwiches poisoned about 300 people at a big picnic. Who was to blame? The meat filling was apparently all right, when received by those who made the patties and the sandwiches. But -- investigation proved that the food had not been kept cool enough. The chicken filling was stored at room temperature, for 24 hours before it was put into patty shells, and the meat sandwiches were exposed for several hours to an outdoor temperature of 90 degrees Fahrenheit. In both cases, the bacteria in the food were supplied with the best possible conditions for their growth. For the bacteria that affect food are always with us. Give them a nice warm place to grow, and the necessary moisture, and they multiply rapidly, forming an infected mass which may or may not be apparent to the eye or nose.

Outbreaks of food poisoning at church suppers and at fairs, particularly in the rural districts, can almost always be laid at the door of insufficient refrigeration. Who has not seen stacks of sandwiches, awaiting the picnic hour, church supper, or fair? If the temperature happens to be one favorable to the growth of harmful bacteria, as it often is, especially in the summer time, the sandwiches may become a distinct menace to health by the time they are eaten.

Meat, fish, and cream fillings for cakes and pies are particularly good places for bacteria to congregate. Perhaps you remember the case in which 150 people, in a New England town, were made ill by eating contaminated chocolate pie. Not so very long ago, 32 people in a Kansas town were made ill by eating cream puffs, found to be infected with bacteria! When these cases

were checked, it was found that the chocolate filling which eventually went into the pies had been held for some time at room temperature, which happened to be 80 degrees Fahrenheit, and that the custard mixture inside the cream puffs had been kept so long that it became well infected with bacteria.

In all these cases of food poisoning, carelessness was the cause, carelessness pure and simple, in handling food after it reached the ultimate consumer.

Of course, not all cases of food poisoning are due to carelessness on the part of the ultimate consumer. Sometimes the poisoning is accidental, as witness the case of the nine fruit cakes that created such a stir last Christmas.

These cakes, it was learned, had been heavily seasoned with arsenic, by the woman who made the fruit cakes for the Christmas trade. A bag containing an insecticide had been left lying in the cellar, within easy reach of the woman's children. The true inside story of how the arsenic found its way into the flour bag will probably never be known, but it's very likely that one of the children, wanting a bag, emptied the insecticide into the flour bag in the pantry. The insecticide looked like flour, to the child. These nine fruit cakes might have wrought havoc during the Christmas season, but as it happened, the federal officials acted so promptly that they retrieved seven of the cakes before they had even been cut. The other two cakes were not discovered before they had made several people very ill indeed, and it was the prompt report of their illness that made it possible to get track of and destroy the seven dangerous cakes, one of which had been shipped to Canada as a Christmas gift.

Well -- it never pays to leave poison around where children can get it. Poison and loaded guns -- I don't know which is more dangerous.

Another case of accidental poisoning is the poisoned-sugar episode. The poisoned sugar, which killed two people and made thirty others violently ill, acquired its deadly load of arsenic in the local grocery store, where a clerk accidentally emptied a package of arsenical rat poison into the sugar bin.

There's one more type of food poisoning I want to talk about today -- the type called <u>botulism</u>. Botulism poisoning affects the central nervous system, and death from it is due to suffocation. The bacteria that cause the deadly botulism poisoning are widely scattered through the soil, which makes them an everlasting menace. The most recent outbreak of botulism followed the eating of canned onions, imported from Italy. Food officials all over the country were notified at once, and every single can was located and destroyed before any more fatalities occurred. There's no time to lose, in finding and removing the cause of botulism.

Now, instead of citing any more cases of poisoning, let me tell you what to do to <u>prevent</u> food poisoning. Here are a few suggestions, prepared by the Bureau of Home Economics, which, if generally followed, would cut down the number of food poisoning mysteries which the Food and Drug officials are called on to solve.

1. Keep foods free from dirt and from insects or other carriers of microorganisms.

2. See that all food to be eaten raw is fresh, clean, and sound, and free from stale odors, from slimy, rotting areas, and from mold. Fresh vegetables and fruits, and other foods to be eaten raw should be carefully and thoroughly washed in pure water before they go onto the table.

3. Serve cooked food just as soon as possible after it's prepared.

4. Do not expose moist or soft cooked food to a temperature above 50 degrees Fahrenheit for more than a few hours. Keep it in the refrigerator. If you have no refrigerator, re-cook the food before serving it, even if it shows no signs of spoilage.

5. Never take a chance on any food with an unusual smell or appearance.

Besides observing these five general rules, we must further safeguard ourselves against the most serious form of food poisoning -- botulism, caused by bacteria in the soil. How do the botulism bacteria make themselves known? By producing a toxin in the food which is their host. Production of this toxin is usually accompanied by spoiling of the food. This spoiling is evident in bad odor, gas formation, or cloudiness of the liquid. Swelling of the container is also a danger signal. We should play safe, and never eat food from cans showing springing, flipping, or swelled lids. In fact, such cans should immediately be called to the attention of food officials, either federal or local. Don't even taste food from glass jars which show leaks around the rubber rings, cloudiness of the liquid, or spurting of the contents when the bottle is opened. Tasting preserved foods that look at all doubtful may prove disastrous. If questionable food must be eaten -- (I can't think of many cases in which it <u>must</u> be eaten) boil it for 20 to 30 minutes just before serving. The toxin produced by botulinus bacteria is destroyed by boiling for 20 to 30 minutes.

Before I conclude this program, I want to suggest that every housewife who has heard this talk send for a new booklet, called "Food Poisoning and the Law." You will learn a great deal more than I have told you, about preventing food poisoning. And if you are canning fruits and vegetables at home, and want to be sure your canning methods are safe, send for "Canning Fruits and Vegetables at Home."

Tomorrow: "Hot Weather Ensembles for Children."